CLAIMS:

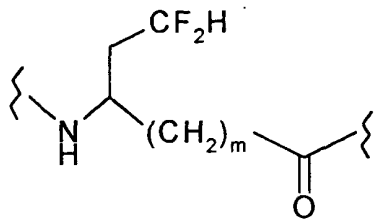
1. A fluorine containing oligopeptide of formula:

Y-B-A-X or Y-B-A'-X'

(FORMULA I) (FORMULA II)

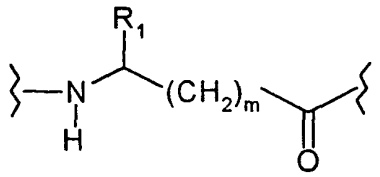
wherein:

A is an amino acid residue of formula:



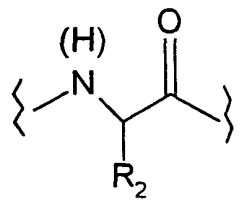
where m is 0 or 1.

A' is an amino acid residue of formula



where m is 0, or 1 and R_1 is a fluorine-substituted hydrocarbyl side chain containing from 1 to 15 carbon atoms;

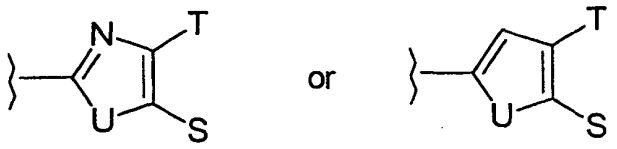
B is a naturally or non-naturally occurring amino acid residue of formula:



wherein R_2 contains from 1 to 20 carbon atoms is a non-polar, or polar but uncharged sidechain or is a side chain containing an acidic functionality;

X is selected from the following:

$-CO_2R_8$; $-H$; $-OR_8$; $-CF_3$; $-CONR_9R_{10}$; $-CF_2CONR_9R_{10}$; $-NH.SO_2R_{25}$ or a heterocyclic group of formula:



wherein U is sulphur, oxygen or NR_{11}; R_8, R_9, R_{10}, R_{11} and R_{25} are, independently, hydrogen or a lower alkyl, lower alkenyl, aryl, or aralkyl group, and S and T are each independently either H or R_{12}, where R_{12} is a lower alkyl, lower alkenyl, aryl or aralkyl group, or can together form a ring;

X' is OH or $-NHSO_2R_{25}$, where R_{25} is as defined above;

and Y is selected from (i) and (ii) below:

(i) Z-F-E-D-C-}

wherein C is a natural or non-natural amino acid residue having a non-polar, polar but uncharged, or acidic side chain containing from 1 to 20 carbon atoms;

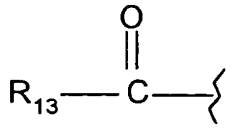
D may be absent, but where present is a natural or non-natural amino acid having a hydrophobic side chain containing 1 to 20 carbon atoms;

E may be absent, but where present is a natural or non-natural amino acid having an acidic side chain containing from 1 to 20 carbon atoms, or is a dicarboxylic acid containing up to 10 carbon atoms;

F may be absent, but where present is a natural or non-natural amino acid having an acidic side chain

containing from 1 to 20 carbon atoms, or is a dicarboxylic acid containing up to 10 carbon atoms; and

Z may be absent, -H, or a group of formula R_7CO-, where R_7 is a group containing from 1 to 20 carbon atoms which is chosen such that the group R_7CO- together with the nitrogen atom to which it is attached forms an amide, urethane or urea linkage;

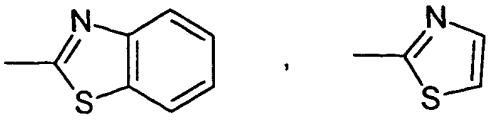
(ii) 

where R_{13} is an aliphatic or aromatic group containing from 1 to 25, carbon atoms and 0-5 oxygen atoms, 0-3 nitrogen atoms, 0 to 2 sulphur atoms and up to 9 other heteroatoms which may be the same or different;

or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt or ester thereof.

2. An oligopeptide of Formula II or a salt or ester thereof according to claim 1 wherein R_1 is selected from:

3. An oligopeptide of Formula I or a salt or ester thereof according to claim 1 wherein X is selected from: $-CO_2H$, $-CONHCH_2Ph$, -H, -OH, $-NHSO_2R_{25}$ (where R_{25} is as defined in claim 1),



4. An oligopeptide of Formula I or a salt or ester thereof according to claim 3 wherein X is selected from: -H; -OH; -COOH, and $-NHSO_2R_{25}$.

5. An oligopeptide of Formula I or II or a salt or ester thereof according to ~~any one of the preceding~~ claim 1 claims wherein B is selected from: glutamic acid and aspartic acid, 2-aminobutyric acid, 4,4-difluoro-2-aminobutyric acid, alanine, isoleucine, valine, leucine, cysteine, phenylalanine, naphthylalanine, β-cyclohexylalanine, and proline.

6. An oligopeptide, salt or ester according to claim 5 wherein B is selected from β-cyclohexylalanine, leucine, glutamic acid and 4,4-difluoro-2-aminobutyric acid.

7. An oligopeptide, salt or ester according to ~~any one of the preceding claims,~~ claim 1 wherein Y is a group of formula:

and C is selected from: alanine, isoleucine, leucine, phenylalanine, valine, norleucine, norvaline, glutamic acid, glutamine, aspartic acid, α-t-butyl glycine, α-cinnamylglycine, homoleucine, 3,5 dichlorophenylalanine 2-thienylalanine, 3-bromophenylalanine and α-cyclopentyl glycine.

8. An oligopeptide, salt or ester according to claim 7 wherein C is selected from: isoleucine, glutamic acid, α-cyclopentylglycine, t-butyl glycine and valine.

9. An oligopeptide, salt or ester according to claim 7 ~~or claim 8~~ wherein D is selected from: methionine, isoleucine, leucine, norleucine, valine, methyl valine,

phenylglycine or diphenylalanine.

10. An oligopeptide, salt or ester according to claim 9 wherein D is leucine or diphenylalanine.

11. An oligopeptide, salt or ester according to claim 9 ~~or claim 10~~ wherein E is selected from glutamic acid, aspartic acid, succinic acid and glutaric acid.

12. An oligopeptide, salt or ester according to claim 11 wherein F is selected from glutamic acid, aspartic acid, succinic acid and glutaric acid.

13. A tripeptide of formula:

Z-C-B-A-X"

in which A, B, C and Z are as defined in claim 1 and X" is a carboxylic acid group ($-CO_2H$), amide group ($-CONR_9R_{10}$) or hydrogen; or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt or ester thereof.

14. A tripeptide, salt or ester according to claim 13 in which Z is a lower alkyloxy group or a group of formula:

$ArCH_2OCO-$ or $ArCH_2NHCO-$

wherein Ar is an optionally substituted aryl group.

15. A tripeptide, salt or ester according to claim 13 ~~or 14~~ wherein the amino acid B is selected from: cyclohexylalanine, leucine, α-aminobutyric acid, 4,4-difluoro-2-aminobutyric acid and phenyl alanine.

16. A tripeptide, salt or ester according to ~~any one of claims 13 to 15~~ claim 13 wherein the amino acid C is selected from: alanine, isoleucine, leucine, phenylalanine, valine, norleucine, norvaline, glutamic acid, glutamine, aspartic acid, α-t-butyl glycine, styrylalanine,

homoleucine, 3,5 dichlorophenylalanine, 2-thienylalanine, 3-bromophenylalanine and α-cyclopentyl glycine.

17. A tripeptide according to ~~any one of claims 13 to 16~~ CLAIM wherein the combination of amino acids C-B is selected from:

isoleucine - cyclohexylalanine
isoleucine - leucine
isoleucine - α-aminobutyric acid
isoleucine - phenylalanine
leucine - leucine
phenylalanine - leucine
valine - leucine
norleucine - leucine
norvaline - leucine
glutamic acid - leucine
glutamine - leucine
n-butylaspartic acid - leucine
aspartic acid - leucine
t-butyl glycine - leucine
glutamic acid - 4,4 difluoro-2-aminobutyric acid
α-cinnamyl glycine - leucine
homoleucine - leucine
2-thienylalanine - leucine
3-bromophenylalanine - leucine
α-cyclopentylglycine - leucine.

18. A hexapeptide, salt or ester according to claim 1 having the formula:

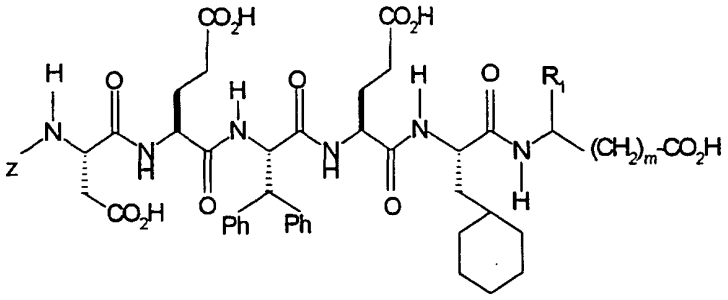
Z-F-E-D-C-B-A-X or Z-F-E-D-C-B-A'-X'

where A-F, X and Z, A' and X' are as defined in claim 1.

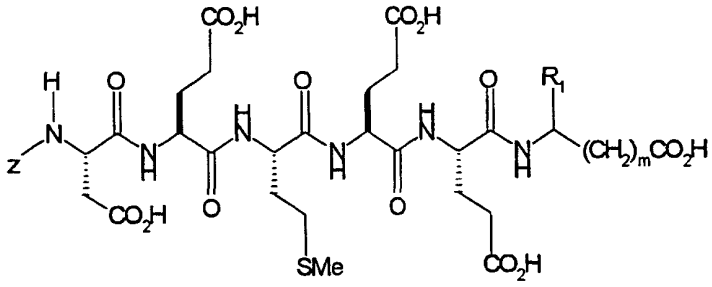
19. A hexapeptide, salt or ester according to claim 18 wherein the group

$\}$-F-E-D-C-B-A-$\{$

is selected from:



and



20. A fluorine containing dipeptide according to Formula I of claim 1 wherein:

X is -COOH;

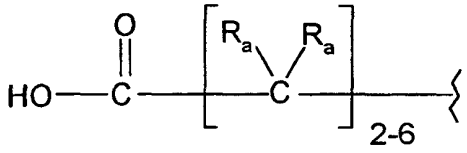
B is leucine; and

Y is a group of formula $R_{13}CO$- where R_{13} is as defined in claim 1;

or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt or ester thereof.

21. A dipeptide, salt, or ester according to claim 20

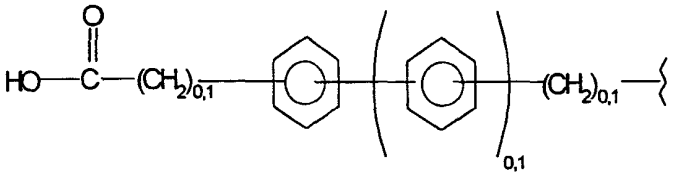
wherein R_{13} is a group of general formula



wherein each R_a is independently selected from hydrogen, lower alkyl, lower alkenyl, lower alkoxy, optionally substituted aryl or aralkyl groups or two R_a taken together result in the formation of a three to seven membered aliphatic or aromatic ring which optionally contains at least one heteroatom.

22. A dipeptide, salt or ester according to claim 21 wherein at least one group $-C(R_a)_2-$ is replaced by -O-.

23. A dipeptide, salt or ester according to claim 21 wherein R_{13} is a group of formula:

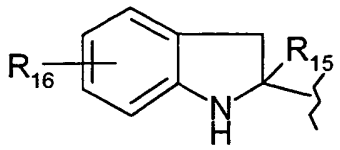


24. A dipeptide salt or ester according to claim 20 wherein R_{13} is a group of formula:

where R_{14} is a cycloalkyl or optionally substituted aryl group.

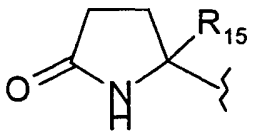
25. A dipeptide salt or ester according to claim 20 wherein R_{13} is a group selected from:

(a)



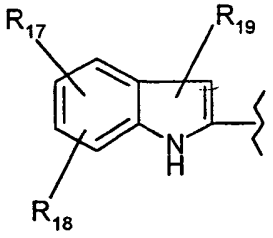
where R_{15} is hydrogen, an optionally branched, optionally interrupted and optionally substituted lower alkyl or lower alkenyl group or an optionally substituted aralkyl group, R_{16} is hydrogen or an optionally substituted and optionally interrupted lower alkoxy or aryloxy- group;

(b)



where R_{15} is as defined above; and

(c)



where each of R_{17}, R_{18} and R_{19}, independently, is selected from hydrogen, optionally substituted lower alkyl, lower alkenyl and lower alkoxy, optionally substituted aryl, aralkyl, aryloxy or aralkoxy, a carboxylic acid group optionally as its lower alkyl ester, a halogen, cyano, or

CF_3 group.

26. A fluorine containing oligopeptide, salt or ester according to any one of the preceding claims for therapeutic use.

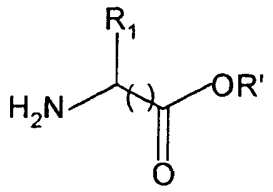
27. The use of a fluorine containing oligopeptide, salt or ester of any one of the preceding claims for the manufacture of a medicament for use in inhibiting the HCV NS3 protease, and/or for use in treating or preventing hepatitis C or a related condition.

28. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a fluorine containing oligopeptide, salt or ester according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 25~~ CLAIM 1 and a pharmaceutically acceptable excipient, diluent or carrier.

29. A method of inhibiting HCV NS3 protease activity, and/or of treating or preventing hepatitis C or a related condition, the method comprising administering to a human or animal subject, a therapeutically or prophylactically effective amount of a composition according to claim 28, ~~or of a fluorine containing oligopeptide salt or ester of any one of claims 1 to 25.~~

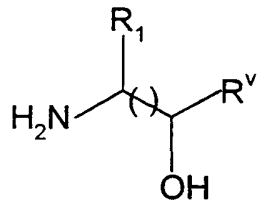
30. A method for the production of a compound of ~~any one of claims 1 to 25~~ CLAIM 1 comprising reaction of a compound of formula $Y\text{-}NH\text{-}CHR_2\text{-}CO_2H$ where R_2 is as defined in claim 1, optionally in a protected form, with an amine coreactant selected from:

ADD A1

(a) 

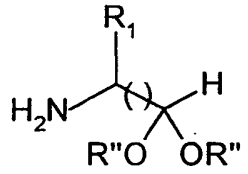
FORMULA K

where R' is a protecting group for a carboxylic acid group and R_1 is as defined in claim 1 and a ($-CH_2-$) group is optionally present at the position marked by brackets;

(b) 

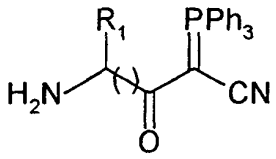
FORMULA L

where R_1 is as defined in claim 1, and R^v is a group corresponding to, or convertible to X or X' of claim 1, and a ($-CH_2-$) group is optionally present at the position marked by brackets;

(c) 

FORMULA M

wherein R_1 is as defined in claim 1 and R" is a lower alkyl group and a ($-CH_2-$) group is optionally present at the position marked by brackets; and

(d) 

FORMULA N

wherein R_1 is as defined in claim 1 and a ($-CH_2-$) group is optionally present at the position marked by brackets.